

BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL

Support To Small + Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) including Social Enterprises, Voluntary & Community Organisations, BME Organisations, etc

In 2005/2006 research was undertaken to assess the opportunities and barriers to developing a diverse supply market for Bristol City Council public sector procurement. The research included an analysis of specific departmental spend, together with a geographic analysis of where the Council carried out most of its expenditure.

This report related specifically to procurement, and not to commissioning although there are some overlapping elements between the two areas. Bristol City Council procurement is regulated by EU and UK procurement regulations and Council procurement and financial regulations; commissioning does not have the same level of regulation.

An outcome of the report is the development of a three – five year plan to encourage a wide range of suppliers to compete for Council contracts. The result will be a more knowledgeable supplier base who can make informed decisions as to whether or not contracting with the Council is appropriate for their organisation. Issues around sustainable development and social inclusion, including local economic development will be included in this plan.

The planned activity will cover several areas.

1 ***Small + medium sized enterprises (SMEs¹) information sessions and training:***

- (a) Understanding public sector procurement, how it works and why; this will be relatively generic; it will also include the areas of e-trading and e-procurement which the Council are committed to.
- (b) Contract specific workshops and seminars where it has been identified that SMEs have an important part to play in the process and contract delivery. This could either be at pre-contract stage or as part of a service review.

2 ***Within Bristol City Council***

- (a) Increasing the visibility of contract opportunities. The Council acknowledge that it is not easy find out about contract opportunities. The introduction of the e-procurement system will ensure that this is clear. The system has recently come online and eventually all contracts will be let through this system, including commissioning agreements. Once an organisation has registered, they can sign up for email alerts of appropriate contract opportunities.
- (b) To review the packaging of contracts to make them more SME-friendly, where appropriate.
- (c) Awareness raising with Council procurement officers on the benefits of using SMEs within the procurement process

¹ SMEs in this context include small and medium sized organisations, social enterprises, voluntary and community organisations, BME-led organisations, etc

- (d) To provide better web-based resources for SMEs
- (e) To provide meaningful feedback for SMEs who have not been shortlisted following the pre-tender questionnaire stage. Where there are common areas of failure, specific training will be arranged.
- (f) To work with other Council departments to identify opportunities.

This is a broad outline of the proposed plan; once it is a draft form, we will be looking for comments and input from the organisational community it is intended to assist.